

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
August 23, 2005
2:00 p.m. CT

Operator: Good day everyone; welcome this Neighborhood Networks conference call. Today's call is being recorded.

At this time, I'd like to turn the call over to your moderator, Ms. Michele Higgs; please go ahead, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: All right. Thank you, Amy. Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks August conference call. For those of you who aren't sweltering, today's topic is "Staffing for Success."

My name, as you've heard, is Michele Higgs, and I'm Technical Assistance Coordinator with Neighborhood Networks. I'm a member of a team that works with you to address the technical assistance needs of the various Neighborhood Network centers around the country.

Before I turn this call over to our speaker for this afternoon, I'd like you to know that we have six new centers to welcome to the neighborhood. From the state of Nebraska, we have the Ralston House Senior Residences, and the Immanuel Courtyard Neighborhood Network Center at Agewell. In Washington State, there's Providence Place, and Blanchet House/Rossi House, I believe they share a center. In Louisiana, we welcome Entergy Technology Center. And in

Puerto Rico, we have El Mirada Las Casas Neighborhood Network Center. Congratulations and welcome to all six centers, welcome to the neighborhood!

As you know, the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, also known as the START business plan contains resource materials that help centers perform the activities so important to assessing resident's needs, as well as mapping assets in the community, and crafting a marketing plan for the center.

START is also important when examining your staffing needs in that it helps you to put your needs into perspective. Such as, can you afford all of the paid staff you want? Or, might you be able to create a mix of volunteer and paid staff to make your center work?

START is also a key to developing partnerships in the community because it strengthens the center's profile as a business and makes the center more attractive to potential partners. These partnerships are essential when recruiting professionals or volunteers, and advancing your programs or assisting residents to pursue their educational goals, or employment or career growth or to improve their approach to financial matters.

If you have questions about the START business plan, or general questions pertaining to the Neighborhood Networks, please call the toll free Neighborhood Networks Information Line at 888-312-2743. You can also visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site, www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org. I also want to remind listeners that an audio and verbatim transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks site in about two weeks.

Now about our topic for today, Staffing for Success. You all know how important a committed, creative, and motivated team is to getting the job done. They must know and understand what the job is, and be able, willing, and inspired, to pull their part of the load. Where do these saints

come from? How do you get them interested in what you're doing? And how do you get them to sign on and stay on to help you do it?

Among the success stories in the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org, there are a few that speak to the issue of staffing. And I'd like to share a bit of one with you. We often speak about how young people in our centers can not only reap the benefits of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, but can also make a mark of their own. In an early story, from 2001, there were two young volunteers, young people 20 and 21 years old, who took their school studies seriously and wanted to use their skills to serve their community, their home. They were encouraged by their center's director to tutor and mentor to the younger participants in the center.

With a little trepidation, because they had little experience working with groups of children, these young adults tried their hands at working with the youngsters. But they found that being fairly close in age to their charges, was a benefit in that the youngsters really enjoyed working with mentors so close in age to them. And they spoke at a workshop on managing people and staff development. And these young people encouraged participants to get to know their volunteers, so that they can steer them to tasks and opportunities that they will feel comfortable with and that are in line with their interests. They said you might also get volunteers that could turn into paid staff as they grow and hone their skills.

Another story speaks to the importance of resident involvement. From 2004 in Beaverton, Oregon, the center director strongly advises establishing a resident council to get residents invested in developing and running the programs that they want.

Now, the speaker joining us today will provide a wealth of information on how to look creatively at your staffing for your Neighborhood Network centers. Our speaker is Mr. Miles Graham. He's Director of the St. John's Empowerment Center in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. And he's taking on those

responsibilities while serving as the compliance officer for United Properties Management of Little Rock, Arkansas, a firm specializing in section 8 and HUD assisted properties. Prior to joining United Properties, Miles was Executive Director of the Scott County Learning Center, which earned national attention for its special goal that each resident participant would have empowerment through education and opportunity.

He was honored in 2002 at the Neighborhood Networks National Conference and was instrumental in forming many partnerships for the Scott County Learning Center. That center served more than 2500 clients per year. And we can safely assume that Miles didn't do it all alone. So I think we'll have a lot to learn from him today.

I'm pleased to introduce Miles Graham. Miles.

Miles Graham: Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you all can hear me OK. As I had told, Michele earlier, I'm calling you from Washington into the call. That I felt like this is an important topic, one that I wish they had covered a long time ago and maybe would have saved me a few headaches.

One of the things, and I think most center directors, especially if they're new, and for those of you who have been at this for a while, I apologize. But if you're a new director or you're starting a new center, one of the things you're going to do is try to find the most experienced person you can find to do whatever job you need done. And I'm going to tell you in advance, that that is not always the best way to go. A lot of times, people with a lot of experience come in with pre-conceived notions of what you – what they feel like you should do -- instead of what you – the vision you have had for your center.

So a lot of times, I don't want to tell you to not hire someone with experience, but look a little bit more closely at some of the new kids on the block. You might be surprised of where they will get you, if you actually want to hire someone. And definitely look at them for a volunteer basis,

because the experience they can earn in your center goes on to allow them to grow even more so.

If you leave this call with anything today, I want you to know that the most important thing you can do for your center is your image. And you're going to – the first thing you're going to ask is what does that have to do with staffing? Well your staffing – I'm a psychologist, and one of the things – or am a student of psychology, I should say. And one of the things that I have always found fascinating is that almost every year they do a study of employees in larger major companies, and they asked them what is the driving force behind your job? And contrary to what you might feel, although most of us in the non profit business can definitely say this for sure, salary is not even close in the top five. And I've always found that interesting. Job satisfaction is actually the number one reason most people stick with the job. The professionalism of the company they are involved with came in at number two. And the organizational skills of their immediate superior, believe it or not, was number three. Salary was actually further down the list.

Job security is important to people nowadays. So, you know, one of the things Michele mentioned a while ago that I think it was very important, and I wrote it down when she was talking, is that don't over staff. It's better to start with a few well paid-positions, if you can afford them, if not-- committed volunteers. But start with a smaller number of staff that you can hold onto rather than to try to do a grand design that might or might not last six months from now, but you have no way of funding past, you know, a first year. In other words, don't . . . Michele told you I'm from Arkansas, so I guess the only way I could put this is "don't count your chickens before they're hatched."

Michele Higgs: I think everybody would understand that one.

Miles Graham: I mean that's a – it's a very inarticulate way of putting it. But the point is, you know, if you cannot fund something in the future, there's no sense in budgeting for it today. And people

like the security of knowing. So you're not going to attract the type of people you need if they in any way seem or feel like you're not in control of the situation. You know, our volunteers all clock in and out. We track their time just like they were employed. They have set schedules. You know, we have appreciation dinners once a month for them, and T-shirts. You know, they don't just show up when they want to. You know, they sign a commitment with us for six months at a time, just like it's a contract. It makes them feel more appreciated. It makes them feel like what they're doing and what they're providing provides value.

And I think you will find in dealing with your volunteers, the more organized, the more professional you come across, the more of an impact you will have on the lives of your volunteers, on the people in the community, as far as getting them to assist you and to help in what you're doing.

When your staffers – you know, if you don't believe you're going to be a success, it's hard to staff for success. You know, in other words, you have to go – live every moment of your center like it is the greatest thing that ever happened to your community. And it is, if it's done right. And as long as you can bring that image across, the staff will follow. You know, don't concentrate so hard on the salary, I mean, Lord knows we all need more money, and if you're in the non profit business, you know, that just almost goes without saying. You did not enter this for the money to start with. And, you know, that's a joke running amongst all of us, I believe.

So, you know, don't always feel guilty if you can't offer a great salary, or feel like you have to settle. Make up for it in other ways. There's different ways you can approach them. Michele, I'm talked out. So you're going to do we have any questions?

Michele Higgs: That's what I was going to ask you. Would you say, are there things like, well we don't have benefits for volunteers as you would for your paid staff, but there might be things that you can do, you know, like allowing them additional time, you know, flexible hours . . .

Miles Graham: Oh Yes, I mean that's part of it, I'm not saying that you need to – one of the things we've done was offer some of our more certified classes; our volunteers took it for free, you know, that compensated for it. And we ended up offering the MOUS certification program at our center. And, you know, all of our volunteers went through it. And most of them got their MOUS certification. So to ...

Michele Higgs: Consider that as benefits.

Miles Graham: Yes.

Michele Higgs: You know this was something that they didn't have to pay for.

Miles Graham: Right. And, you know, one of the volunteers at, you know, at the last conference in Orlando, one of the centers in Arkansas, one of their residents won a national recognition, the *Living the Dream* award, because when she had started volunteering at the center, she was a resident. She started volunteering at the center. And in the afternoon, she's helping tutor the kids. In return, they let her take the classes that they offered in computer technologies, and she went on to where now she works for a large company in Dallas. She's no longer in assisted housing. She's the department manager for an IT department for a large nursing home company.

So, you know, I mean track your success stories and show your volunteers where they can go. And you'd be surprised at the type – of the people, you know – and if you're in a rural area, use your newspapers. They'll write about anybody. I mean it's true. A lot of times, that's one of the advantages rural areas have over larger urban areas. You know, news is hard to come by sometimes in those smaller towns. And they will, you know, spotlight one of the volunteers once a month with the newspaper. Talk to them about doing it, I mean they would love it.

Michele Higgs: Yes.

Miles Graham: And it really shows an interest in what they're doing.

Michele Higgs: That was where I was going to go. It's like if you're showing an interest in them, and you're paying attention to them, it's one of those instances where you catch people doing something right.

Miles Graham: Exactly.

Michele Higgs: And talk about it.

Miles Graham: You know because even the humblest person likes to be appreciated. You know, a lot of times they'll say well they don't want any recognition. And, you know, maybe they don't want a public recognition. You know, there's some people, you know, have a different mentality on what they call recognition. But, you know, sometimes a pat on the back, a thank you . . . And, you know, when you run the centers, sometimes you get so focused on raising funds that you lose sight of what the real important thing is, which is the people we serve, and the people that help us serve them.

Michele Higgs: Yes.

Miles Graham: You know, and sometimes we lose sight, you know, if you run the center, it's just a simple fact you will lose sight of it. But if at all possible, if we can keep that focus on what we're there for to start to with, usually and the quality of the people you add will be greater too.

Michele Higgs: A question for you, you just brought up quality of your people, one of the things that I've just sort of thought about, when you're looking for volunteers, do you screen your volunteers as

carefully as you – I mean would you recommend that, that you screen your volunteers, as carefully you would an employee, because they're as valuable to you as a paid employee?

Miles Graham: Yes. I mean all of our – anyone that is involved in our center goes through a complete background check for criminal activity. Plus, even volunteers have to list their work history, their personal references, you know, community leaders or somebody that they know. You know, I don't want them to think "she's a volunteer; we need everybody we can get in the building." You know, and even if you need everybody that you can get in the building, you don't want to come across that way. I mean that may sound a little hypocritical but it's very key.

You know, there's been some instances where I started out believing the person would have been a great volunteer, but I couldn't use them after some of their history come out. You know, you cannot be too careful in this day and age. And I mean I knew them, I knew them socially, occasionally just meeting, and I thought he would be great and had even recommended it to him. But after we went into his background we could not have him in our center. So, you know, don't ever assume because you know someone that they would – no, in this day and age it's too dangerous not to do a complete background check on anybody that volunteers or you hire at your center. Whether it's a multifamily, senior citizen it doesn't matter.

Michele Higgs: And you brought up another point if there's something that's not right, you can't be afraid to let that individual go, even in a volunteer setting.

Miles Graham: That's exactly right. You know, and one of the things you definitely need, you know, you need a written employee policy and a written volunteer policy. And other than explain – other than substituting the word "employee" for "volunteer" in certain circumstances there should be hardly any difference in them at all.

Michele Higgs: Let me ask you a question to follow up on that. Is there any place that you would suggest for a boilerplate for these kinds of agreements? Is there a Web site that you would guide us to?

Miles Graham: CTCNet has a lot of downloadable online forms that deals with human resources. But one of our national partners now, Office Depot, if you go to their Office Depot home page ...

Michele Higgs: OK.

Miles Graham: They have a whole human resources section on downloadable forms that has exit interviews set out that are free—you can download them. They usually abide by every state law. A lot of the stuff that you need to do on evaluation on the employees. You know, and one thing you need to bear in mind is when you're evaluating a volunteer other than changing the name, you should treat them like an employee.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Miles Graham: Because what they are doing is worth money to you.

Michele Higgs: OK. I hope everybody is paying attention, out there. You evaluate them as carefully as you would a paid employee. OK. Now let me ask another thing. When you're talking about getting to know your volunteers, and getting to know – and again it's a parallel to a paid employee. And you wouldn't want to place a person in a position that is totally alien to what they do. You know, if you have somebody who let's see, who paints, you wouldn't suddenly want to put them on a typewriter. Do you have those kinds of – I guess that kind of evaluation in mind when you're placing your volunteers, you're placing them carefully? Or, you know, you have a, what is the word I'm trying to think of, a process for ...

Miles Graham: Yes, well, you know, when someone wants to volunteer for any of our centers now, they have to, number one they have to fill out an application. And it's similar to an employee application where they have to list references, you know, and their personal information, of course.

But then, you know, they have to list their areas of interest, just like you would list on a job application your work history. We get your areas of interest and what you like to do as far as your hobbies, your spare time, and anything that relates to that. So, you know, we ask them to explain to us in a free form letter how . . . ((inaudible)) forms. You know, I want them to explain to me in their own words why they think they would be a good volunteer for my center, and what they think they can bring to it. And, you know, to be honest with you, I can't give you a set formula for how you pick, but it's something once you start, experience will teach you. Michele, you were very correct in saying, that one thing you don't want to do is take a math teacher, and make them teach reading if that's not what they like to do.

On the same token, you know you don't want to – somebody who wants to volunteer, and they tell you, "OK, I'd like to deal with older kids," and because you're short handed, you would say, "well no, I need you to do this, in the kindergarten through third graders." Number one, she may do it that day, but you're going to lose that volunteer. You know, you cannot, and one thing you do not want to do is try to force a round circle into a square peg . . . I mean, you know, you've got to – you know, a lot of times, you shouldn't do an employee that way if you want to keep them for the long haul. But you definitely can't do a volunteer that way. You know, somebody goes and asks me one time, you know, why do you keep saying treat them like employees, when, you know, my employee, if he doesn't do a job, he goes home. I said well then you're still living in the old days, and that's why your turnover is so high.

Times change. And, you know, we're sitting here, supposed to be teaching 21 century technology, we should be on the cutting edge of change in all of our areas, not just on computers.

And you cannot have the mentality—"well, this is what I need. And even though I've got these six volunteers who want to do this over here or something else, you know, but this is what I want." A lot of times you're shot before you start. You know, build some of your programs for what a (inaudible) group of volunteers want to do.

Michele Higgs: I got you.

Miles Graham: Because if you don't keep the volunteers interested, they will not stay it's just that simple.

Michele Higgs: All right. And what I'm doing right now is creating a list of points so that we can go back and go over them and be sure we've covered everything. But one question I want to ask is what do you think about organizations – outside organizations, say, for instance, like SCORE? What is it, Service Corps of Retired Executives?

Miles Graham: Yes, I've had great work, you know, the retired executives, there's a required – almost every town has a retired federal workers chapter. They are great; depending on the state you're in, and how rural you are, you know, the home economist club is usually done through extension service – home extension service. They have a great volunteer staff.

Now, if you're in a large urban area, there's the VISTA volunteers. You know, but be prepared if you go through SCORE ((inaudible)) to be able to deal with the paperwork involved with those types of individuals.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Miles Graham: They are federally funded, but there's a lot of paperwork involved in keeping them on your site. You know, so you've got to be – if you want them to come to your site to help you they

can be a great asset, but at the same time you are making a commitment that you will do your part to help them too. That's a two way street on that one.

Michele Higgs: I see, I see. Now, when you are talking about getting residents involved, what would you think about, I mean creating a resident council, because I think that was one of the things that we talked about in the ...

Miles Graham: Right. Well, now I've always had an HMI, where, you know, number one you've abided by the START plan, you have done a resident survey. It's just that simple. And if you haven't -- if anybody's listening and they haven't done the resident survey and you've opened your center, then stop right now, and go do one. I mean it's just that simple. Because number one, I don't think you should be even open without one because you cannot really serve a group or a population of people that you don't even know what they want.

And I mean that sounds kind of hard, but I mean I take that that seriously. The success of your center depends on it, because you have to tailor your services to what your clients need, or your residents. To do that, you have to have them involved. They will be the driving -- no matter who you get involved as volunteers, your residents will be the driving force. We have what they call a resident advisory council that, you know, that meets once every three months, and tells us where they think we can improve as far as our services go. They tell us some of the rules that we have that they don't like. And if they tell us why they don't like them, and if we have to have them, we explain to them why, and that usually keeps problems from festering further down the road. And a lot of times they come up with their own solutions that have been amazing at times. And then, you got to learn that there's no sense in reinventing the wheel. And if somebody has all ready been through it, use it.

And with residents a lot of times, you know, it's a misconception that if you live in assisted housing, you know, that your mentality is challenged or something. You know, I've had retired

teachers that live in, you know, they retired years ago. It does not stop them from mentoring math students in algebra, things like that. So I mean don't just assume because they're a resident that they don't have anything to offer.

Michele Higgs: I see. OK. Good. And that was where I was leading to. These people, with the residents, guided, of course, by the resident council, and the survey, would they be good sources of volunteers for your program?

Miles Graham: Absolutely. In fact, you know, a lot of our – of course St. John's is a multifamily property, and we do a lot of after school programs for the kids. Now we do a lot of field trips. And, you know, we do a lot of summer activities for the kids. Now if the parents want to involve – get their kids involved in it, then they have to commit to so many hours a week of volunteer work anyway.

Michele Higgs: Oh, great.

Miles Graham: I mean, you know, I find something for them to do. Because I don't want to make any of them feel they can't contribute, you know, because I've had a lot of them – a lot of times, single mothers that don't finish high school for whatever reason. Again, I say OK; you know, you teach kids to read. Well maybe they can't read that well, but they can start with a younger crowd. And see that also usually gets me to get them into some of the classes for themselves that they really need.

Michele Higgs: OK. It sounds like a good idea. I was going to ask that, you know, just getting the parents involved as a means of – I'm sorry getting the children involved as a means of getting the parents involved, because so often I hear of centers where they end up being daycare centers, because the parents don't do anything with the centers.

Miles Graham: Right. But that's one of the rules, and we don't allow that. I mean the children register with us and the parent wants them to be in the after school program, that's fine. But they have to go through part of the class as well. There's a parenting class involved, and they have to commit to so many hours of volunteer work, and in exchange the kids get to participate in certain extracurricular events, and it doesn't cost them anything.

Michele Higgs: Yes, so it's a good balance.

Miles Graham: Right.

Michele Higgs: Well what I'm going to do is read over the points that I've got here, and just to recap that you said that more experience doesn't always translate into more dedication.

Miles Graham: Right.

Michele Higgs: You need to treat your volunteers like employees. And that means to reward them, and appreciate them as you would your paid staff.

Don't try to force a square peg into a round hole. And that's, you know, getting someone to do something that they can't do or don't like to do.

Don't count your chickens before they hatch, of budgeting. I'm sorry; you're going to be hung with that one there. That's on you there.

Let's see, I have treat and evaluate volunteers like staff.

And I have keep volunteers . . . , I think it says keep volunteers involved. This is my handwriting I can't read, mind you.

And then we have involved – involve groups of volunteers of retired executives, or teachers, or VISTA, understanding that there may be paperwork involved with the federal programs.

Miles Graham: Right.

Michele Higgs: And then, finally be sure to do a resident survey first. You need to know what your residents want, the success of your center depends on it.

Miles Graham: Yes, it does.

Michele Higgs: Did I miss anything? Do you want to add to it?

Miles Graham: I think you pretty well covered most of it.

Michele Higgs: OK. Good. Well I ...

Miles Graham: I did want to – you know, be professional in your image of your center at all times.

Michele Higgs: Oh Yes, that's right, professional and organized.

Miles Graham: Yes, that's – of course, you know that from our phone calls. But that's one of my first things everybody asks me, be professional.

Michele Higgs: Yes. Be professional and organized, because if it doesn't look like a business that's organized, you're not going to get that kind of work out of your people.

Miles Graham: That's correct.

Michele Higgs: OK. Well what I think we can do Miles is go over to our question-and-answer. Let me see if have anyone on the line. Amy, have we anybody online for questions?

Operator: Our question-and-answer session will be conducted electronically. If you would like to ask a question, please press the star key followed by the digit one on your telephone. If you are using a speakerphone, please make sure your mute function is turned off, to allow your signal to reach our equipment. We will take as many questions as time permits, and we'll take them in the order that you signal us. Once again, that is star one.

And we have a question from Peggy Meola of National Church Residence.

Michele Higgs: OK. Great, go ahead, Peggy. Thank you for calling.

Peggy Meola: Good afternoon. This is my first time on. And we just recently set up our center, just getting started, brand new.

Michele Higgs: Great.

Peggy Meola: And my question is with getting volunteers, I understand that importance of getting the criminal background checks, but what are your feelings on credit checks, also, background credit checks. I know our company does that for employees. Would you say that we should be also doing this for volunteers, too? I think it would limit some of our volunteers if there was a credit check done, or how important is actual credit when it comes to volunteers?

Miles Graham: Well I'm going to be honest with you, Peggy, I've done some consulting work for companies, and I'm not a believer in doing credit checks on employees either. I don't believe that that really can justify the type of employee – I think lots of employees get overlooked. There's too

much problems in the credit reporting system still, for that to be an effective tool, for evaluating someone's personality. I would personally not bring that into a volunteer situation.

Peggy Meola: OK. Thank you. I don't think it belongs there either, but I just think it will be something that our company will want us to look at as if we're going to be treating ...

Miles Graham: No. As long as they don't have access to money where maybe they think they could steal something, I mean other than that, I don't believe that would have a true, you know, there are going to be people that disagree with me on this. But I just don't find that that has some bearing on it. No, I wouldn't do it myself, no.

Peggy Meola: OK. Thank you.

Operator: And once again if you do have a question, it is star one. And we have no further questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: OK. I do want to ask this, Miles, and it may have come at a point where I didn't hear you. In pulling together funds for your staff, do you feel that, I don't know, you should do fundraising for, you know, just to get staff in there? And is it so important to get paid staff first? Or, you know, do what you can with a mix of paid and volunteer? And I may just have missed this while you were talking . .

Miles Graham: Well, you know, I believe that every center has to have a core paid staff member, or two, depending on the size of their center. Because I don't care what happens, you have to have somebody there that will give that professional image day in and day out, and a sense of continuity.

Other than that, to be honest with you, depending, you know, and of course, Scott County Learning Center only had five paid staff members, two full-time, and that's including myself, and three part-time. And we served 2500 people a year. We had 15 volunteers. Almost all of our classes were taught by are volunteers. The after school tutoring program, of course, was paid staff, because it was easier to – we worked through the school system to get our tutoring program up and running through a 21st Century Grant, and worked as a partner with the schools, you know, which is one of the things those grants had to do. And it paid for our tutors as well. So we actually shared a grant.

You know, I believe that your staff has to be the core, depending on the amount of staff you can afford. But don't overdo it just because you can't – just because you may have money this year, don't overpay your staff this year, and then have to – don't get into a feast and famine mentality on that.

Michele Higgs: OK. I got you. Now one more, I'm going to open – the lines are open, but I have another for you.

Miles Graham: OK.

Michele Higgs: Do you have any suggestions about – or any thoughts about identifying bilingual volunteers, or volunteers that work with the elderly, you know, that are – have a particular sensitivity for the elderly? Because we have a number of centers in the Neighborhood Networks group that ...

Miles Graham: And I believe that's important. I have not – I have just now started working with some of the elderly properties, and some of the 811s with the handicap properties. And, you know, I had worked in the multifamily where the elderly people mentored the younger. But, you know, one of the things that we're going to do at two of the – well it's not me, it's another center that's going in,

in Bentonville, Arkansas, which everybody in the world knows where Bentonville, Arkansas is right, it's the home of Wal-Mart.

Michele Higgs: Yes, OK. Great.

Miles Graham: Home of Wal-Mart and Tyson Chicken. I mean everybody in the country should know where that is.

Michele Higgs: OK. Well, we got it now.

Miles Graham: Yes, so needless to say, finding funding for their center was not that hard to do.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Miles Graham: But we started an "adopt-a-grandparent" program at two of the elderly centers, and where teenagers, honor students at the high schools adopt grandparents. And they sign a commitment at the start of the school year. It's part of their community service towards their scholarships for college, they will serve 16 hours of volunteer work either at a nursing home or a Section 8 elderly housing facility.

Michele Higgs: I see.

Miles Graham: So, you know, and just talk to them. And some of them –and of course, the senior citizen classes that we added to two of our properties for basic computers is taught by 17 year-old boys.

Michele Higgs: OK. That's the best they know it all.

Miles Graham: I mean they know it, plus they have the ultimate patience.

Michele Higgs: That's something to pay attention to. Write that down.

Miles Graham: Yes, because actually I don't work with the seniors that closely but it is very important that they do.

Michele Higgs: Yes, I got you. And any thoughts about the bilingual?

Miles Graham: Yes, you know, Michele, it's important. Of course, I'm going to be honest with you, in Arkansas we have not run into that problem a lot yet. It is starting to be an issue at some of our properties in our larger cities in Arkansas, like Little Rock. But we are just now coming into that. I mean bilingual is definitely going to be a problem. And, you know, teaching ESL classes are becoming more and more important.

Michele Higgs: Yes, I hear that.

Miles Graham: You know, again that goes back to your resident survey. Your resident survey will tell you what you have to have.

Michele Higgs: And something occurred to me while you were speaking is that might be another place, where the high schools, and students might come in and be helpful, because in many instances, the kids are bilingual.

Miles Graham: Oh, yes.

Michele Higgs: Where the parents might not be. And different cities have different populations and different concentrations in different languages.

Miles Graham: Right.

Michele Higgs: And that same kind of paradigm might be applied, where, you know, the young folks are, you know, volunteered, and trading in their community service hours to participate in, you know, training, computer training or whatever, using their language skills.

Miles Graham: Absolutely, because, you know, and it's a misconception and you've got to learn to think outside the box, in that, you know, don't just automatically assume that the second language you need is Hispanic or Spanish.

Michele Higgs: Yes.

Miles Graham: There's parts of Texas, where the second language is not Spanish, it's German. You know, and people automatically assume, I grew up in a town in Texas where the second language was not Spanish, it was German. So I mean it's just, you know, don't assume what your residents need if you have never asked them.

Michele Higgs: Yes, exactly. And that's again, where that resident survey comes in.

Miles Graham: Absolutely. I work straight back to that.

Michele Higgs: OK. Sounds good. Amy, I'm going to ask you again, do we have any questions out there?

Operator: We have no questions; however, to give everyone yet another opportunity, it is star one.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Operator: And we'll hear from Richard Chadwick.

Michele Higgs: OK. Great, thank you. Hi, Richard.

Richard Chadwick: Good morning.

Michele Higgs: How are you?

Richard Chadwick: Say, Miles, do you have a feel for approximately how many hours per week or per month your typical volunteer performs?

Miles Graham: It depends on what age. Generally, the younger ones will volunteer between 8 to 10 hours a week. If they're between 20 and 36, and they're married and have a family of their own, you can usually only get them from 4 to 8 hours a week. And usually, your best volunteers are 45 to 65 believe it or not, and they volunteer sometimes anywhere from 12 to 25 hours a week.

Richard Chadwick: Thank you.

Michele Higgs: That's – I guess that shows the dynamic that comes in to play as folks are working and raising families. It's, as they get older, they have more time.

Miles Graham: Right.

Michele Higgs: Yes, OK.

Operator: Joseph Mayerhoff has our next question.

Michele Higgs: OK. Good. Thank you.

Joseph Mayerhoff: Good afternoon. Miles I had the pleasure of listening to your very informative session at the national conference at the end of June. And one of the things that you brought up there, was something that worked very well in my center, and that was going to a local college, particularly a community college, and making an arrangement with them, whereby we ended up getting some volunteers, which in my case turned into full-time staff.

Miles Graham: Right. Absolutely. That's – you know, if you look at your potential, you know, and what you just said is a perfect example of a volunteer that, you know, if you'll work with them, the potential of where they can go is almost as great as your center's is. Absolutely.

Operator: Mr. Mayerhoff, was there anything further?

Joseph Mayerhoff: No.

Operator: Thank you. And there are no further questions.

Michele Higgs: We'll give it about two seconds, and if we have no more questions, we'll close up shop.
Miles, I think this has been great.

Miles Graham: Thank you very much.

Michele Higgs: Yes, this has been a lot of good information; I'm so appreciative and thank you for taking the time out of your day and your trip to Washington to participate.

Miles Graham: Yes, I've had several of them peaking over my shoulder right now, to see my notes on what we were talking about.

Michele Higgs: Really, oh, dear, oh, dear. I think Amy was about to give us a call.

Operator: Yes, we do have one further question from Martha Picasso.

Miles Graham: OK.

Diana Mann: Hi, this is Diana Mann. I have a question. We have a property that is located in a very terrible area in San Francisco. And it is even – it's so bad, the taxis won't go there. Domino's won't go there. And so how do we get staff in an area, where nobody really wants to be. Even the police don't go there that often.

Michele Higgs: Oh, dear.

Miles Graham: Well you start at the police department. Find out what you've got to do to get them involved.

Diana Mann: OK. But how do you get the staffing to do that?

Miles Graham: Well, I mean you're going to have to hire security. You're going to have to start with security to be able to make the people that even work there feel... Do you have any employees at all besides the – I mean not just the center, but what about the property staff? What do they do? I mean do they have any?

Diana Mann: They don't have enough property staff. That's the problem. The problem is that it's understaffed. They don't have enough money. They have a very hard time with maintenance. I mean a lot of our properties don't have a lot of money because we're in a high area, where the rents are really high. We're 25 percent above the norm in terms of rental property, and in terms of the cost

of living here. It's a very high cost and the property does not have enough in order to keep the property going and to keep the Neighborhood Network. But they are trying to drive to keep their Neighborhood Network open.

Miles Graham: OK. I would start with trying to get the police department involved. I can tell you, I don't know if I should do this, the best person to contact concerning your issue is just to have a ((inaudible)). You need to contact Thaddeus Miles at MassImpact in Boston, Massachusetts. He runs security – he runs – he was with the violence prevention program with the Boston Housing Authority, and they've done wonders there by bringing the community together.

I'll be honest with you, I don't know that much about your problem because I'm not even urban. I mean, you've got to feel safe before you can even ((inaudible)), if you've got to have your staff go there, if you're going to get volunteers to go there.

Michele Higgs: May I jump in here on this one?

Miles Graham: Sure.

Michele Higgs: And I can help you make that connection if need be, but I think Miles is right you've got to deal with security first, and it's not going to happen today, you know. This is going to take some time. But I think security first, to make everybody feel safe on the property, at least their staff. And then keep the steps going from there. But I think you're on point, Miles, with Thaddeus Miles might be a good source of information on this one.

Diana Mann: Well, the problem is that the police don't even want to go there. That's why they have few drive-bys. The only time they actually show up is when there's an actual thing going on, but they don't even want to be there, because of the high violence and gangs in the area and the drive by shootings. It's a very trying property.

Michele Higgs: It sounds like you need the media involved. I mean they can't abandon the property, and, you know, just leave the people to fend for themselves.

Miles Graham: I would start waging me a real war against the police department in the media in that case. I mean I'm not one of these people who takes no for an answer. So if they just won't come by, then I would start calling the newspapers, television stations, radio stations, whatever I had to do to make them aware that, you know, especially in election years, mayors and chief of police will do something, I promise you.

Michele Higgs: Oh, absolutely.

Miles Graham: If you raise enough stir in the public eye, they will do something.

Michele Higgs: Yes, they want to be seen as doing a good job, and that's not a good job if they police are telling you that they can't ...

Miles Graham: No. If the police are telling you they won't come there, then you need to – I would start with your HUD coordinator at your local field office, because, you know, they can actually get involved in it in that case.

Michele Higgs: Does that help?

Miles Graham: Call your HUD coordinator for San Francisco at your San Francisco field office, and tell them about the problem you're having. Because they can – a lot of times a federal official will have more clout.

Diana Mann: I am the HUD coordinator.

Miles Graham: You are the HUD coordinator. And you can't do anything with the chief of police?

Diana Mann: No. We've tried.

Miles Graham: Well, that's very strange.

Michele Higgs: I mean it sounds like a natural for a partnership of some sort, but they're not ...

Miles Graham: And in San Francisco, now you've got my curiosity up.

Michele Higgs: Yes. This is interesting. Well Diana, why don't we do this, of course, we're not going to be able to solve this right now. Let's do a little legwork and I'll find out some information and get back to you off line. Is that going to work?

Miles Graham: Yes, and I will find out some stuff too that can help. That's interesting.

Michele Higgs: Yes, that's ...

Miles Graham: If you can't get anything done from the HUD office, then there definitely needs to be some partnership issues dealt with down there.

Michele Higgs: Yes, they should be coming together – some coming together for you. Is that going to work for you?

Diana Mann: That would help.

Michele Higgs: OK. We'll see what we can do on this end. Thanks for calling in.

Miles Graham: Yes.

Operator: Now we have a follow up from Peggy Meola.

Michele Higgs: OK.

Peggy Meola: Hi, I just have a couple of things I'd like to share with what you folks were just discussing there. A couple of things in some real hard core areas, when the police department are kind of refusing to get involved, unless they really have to be there. Go to your – the police academy itself, the brand-new recruits coming out. I found that they're real eager to make a name for themselves, to be part of the community. And the new cadets seem to want to volunteer to be part of a community because they need to feel some sense of belonging coming on to the force.

The other thing was, again, with the housing authority, I think the housing authority police with getting volunteers from that group of people or they may know someone in their own family or somebody that would be able to help. Because they know what it's like because they work there already in those types of areas.

And then, the last thing, my suggestion would be churches; the folks that live there go to church somewhere. I would plead my heart, as a service coordinator, I do that a lot with churches, you know, in this situation because they live there. And if you can get peers to come in there who live there, and the churches are an excellent avenue.

Miles Graham: Definitely.

Michele Higgs: Thank you. Thank you, Peggy.

Peggy Meola: You're welcome.

Michele Higgs: That's helpful. Just any kind of venue to try to get answers on this one. Thank you much. I'll make a note. Any other calls, Amy?

Operator: Yes, ma'am. Another follow up from Richard Chadwick.

Richard Chadwick: Hi. This situation in San Fran, I've never lived there, I've been through there for a few times. But I have had houses elsewhere, and if the cops seem to be hesitant it might be because there's no support from the community. There's a synergistic effect when you get the cops involved, to come down and have a talk presented to the residents, about a neighborhood crime watch. And when the cops see the residents become interested, in taking care of themselves, the cops suddenly become more interested, and more involved with the neighbors. It's sort of like a contagious effect.

Michele Higgs: That sounds like a good one. Like a domino thing.

Richard Chadwick: Right. Synergy is a beautiful concept – or result rather. And it's just the idea of finding the right formula.

Michele Higgs: Again, like I mentioned earlier, it just takes some time to arrive at the right formula in getting things to work. Thanks so much Richard.

Richard Chadwick: Good luck to you out in San Fran.

Miles Graham: Yes, definitely.

Michele Higgs: Absolutely. Well I don't want us to get too far off of staffing, but are there any other questions out there?

Operator: No, ma'am.

Michele Higgs: OK. One of the things that I did want to ask, we talked about working with community colleges and local universities, and things like that. But is there any work done say with, I want to say distance learning. Say you've got centers in places like South Dakota, where it may be miles between centers and possible volunteer sources. I guess I want to find out what we can do in terms of creating partnerships to assist these folks?

Miles Graham: Well as I've all ready said, in that particular case, it's still better to go to a community college, than a full university. Because a lot of their funding is based on who they serve, so they may have a stake in helping you serve your residents, and clients at your center.

Michele Higgs: I see.

Miles Graham: And a lot of times they have grants that their schools can receive that would cover what you're talking about.

Michele Higgs: I see. And one last thing, when we're talking about, and this may be something that the resident survey would be responsible for putting together, but just so you see that the workplace, the folks in the workplace reflect the interests of the residents, again, we're talking about referring to that resident survey in terms of being sure that you have folks that are providing the proper services, and are having the proper skills to address the needs of the residents.

Miles Graham: Well you can do that through your survey. And, you know, and you've got to have, not only through your survey, but you've got to have followup to that. You know, chart your

participants to see how they do after they leave some of your classes. You know, that's the only way you're going to be able to tell whether or not you're actually accomplishing anything.

Michele Higgs: . . . what you're getting. OK. All right, I think we've hit on all of our points. I think we've hit on all of your points. And I think we're going to bring this call to a close. Miles, I want to thank you again, you know, for sharing the time and your information with us. I really appreciate your taking time from your meeting. And I'm going to thank our participants. A reminder, that the Neighborhood Networks information line is 888-312-2743. You can call with your START questions, or your general queries about Neighborhood Networks. And you can also get resources, and information on the Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. I thank you so much for joining for us this conversation. Our next conference call will take place on Tuesday, September 20, 2005 on the topic of Basic Fund Development for Neighborhood Network Centers.

Thanks again for joining us today and take good care.

Miles Graham: Thank you.

Operator: That does conclude today's conference. We thank you for your participation.

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